DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 474 404 EA 032 432

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TITLE	New Challenges, New Directions: School Improvement, Democratic Community, and Social Justice.
PUB DATE	2003-00-00
NOTE	44p.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Opinion Papers (120)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Access to Education; Accountability; Constructivism (Learning); Critical Thinking; Curriculum Development; *Democratic Values; Educational Assessment; *Educational Improvement; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Family School Relationship; Instructional Improvement; Instructional Leadership; National Standards; Racial Attitudes; School Community Relationship; *Social Values; State Standards

ABSTRACT

Building on the strengths and shortcomings of modernist views of organizations and leadership, this discursive paper enters the national conversation among scholars and practitioners about what constitutes the core of their knowledge and practice. It provides a discussion of three national themes about the core of educational administration--school improvement, democratic community, and social justice--and how each theme relates specifically to current national and state political policy initiatives. Within the section on school improvement, the paper addresses clarifying educational purposes; encouraging collective learning; aligning with state educational standards; providing support to teachers; and making data-driven decisions in education. Within the section on democratic community, the paper touches upon democratic values; family and community involvement in education; national and state educational policies; and curriculum development, with a look at critical thinking and constructivist theory. Within the section on social justice, the paper briefly discusses educational opportunities; inequities in schooling; and systemic racism in schools. (Contains 82 references.) (Author/WFA)

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EA EATR 0129

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New Challenges, New Directions:

School Improvement, Democratic Community, and Social Justice

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Abstract

Building on the strengths and shortcomings of modernist views of organizations and leadership, this article enters the national conversation among scholars and practitioners about what constitutes the core of their knowledge and practice. The article provides an in-depth discussion of three national themes about the core of educational administration – school improvement, democratic community, and social justice – and how each theme relates specifically to current national and state political policy initiatives.

The Post–Behavioral Science Era:

Excellence, Community, and Justice

The behavioral science approach influenced the preparation and practice of school administrators for some time, but it has lost much of its original appeal recently with challenges to modernist views of organizations and leadership. Building on the strengths and shortcomings of the past, three powerful, interrelated concepts of school improvement, democratic community, and social justice emerge, which form the development of the next era of the profession: the post–behavioral science era (Murphy, 1999; Murphy, 2002a; Murphy, 2002b). Joseph Murphy reminds us that "persons wishing to affect society as school leaders must be directed by a powerful portfolio of beliefs and values anchored in issues such as justice, community, and schools that function for all children and youth" (Murphy, 2002b, p. 186).

School Improvement

Accountability for school improvement is a central theme of state policies. The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (Public Law 107-110) sets demanding accountability standards for schools, school districts, and states, including new state testing requirements designed to improve education. For example, the law requires that states develop both content standards in reading and mathematics and tests that are linked to the standards for grades 3 through 8, with science standards and assessments to follow. States must identify adequate yearly progress (AYP) objectives and disaggregate test results for all students and subgroups of students based on socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, English language proficiency, and disability. Moreover, the

law mandates that 100% of students must score at the proficient level on state tests by 2014. Furthermore, the *No Child Left Behind Act* requires states to participate every other year in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading and mathematics.

Will schools, school districts, and states be able to respond to the demand? In an ideal system, school improvement efforts focus educational policy, administration, and practices directly on teaching and learning. This will require districtwide leadership focused directly on learning. School leaders can accomplish this by (1) clarifying purpose, (2) encouraging collective learning, (3) aligning with state standards, (4) providing support, and (5) making data-driven decisions (Lunenburg, 2002). Taken together, these five dimensions provide a compelling framework for accomplishing sustained districtwide success for all children.

Clarifying Purpose

The school district and the administrators and teachers who work in it are accountable for student learning. This assertion has strong economic, political, and social appeal; its logic is clear. What teachers teach and students learn is a matter of public inspection and subject to direct measurement (Elmore, 2000). Superintendents need to develop a practical rationale for school improvement. Clearly and jointly held purposes help give teachers and administrators an increased sense of certainty, security, coherence, and accountability (Barth, 2001). Purposes cannot remain static for all time, however. They must be constantly adapted to changing circumstances and the needs of the system. Few really successful schools lack purpose (Lunenburg & Irby, in press).

In their studies of "successful school restructuring" in over 1,500 schools, Newmann and Wehlage (1995) found that successful schools focused on "authentic" pedagogy (teaching that requires students to think, to develop an in depth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important realistic problems), and student learning. They achieved this in two ways: greater organizational capacity and greater external support. The most successful schools, according to Newmann and Wehlage, were those that functioned as professional communities. That is, they found a way to channel staff and student efforts toward a clear, commonly shared purpose for learning. Moreover, they found that external agencies helped schools to focus on student learning and to enhance organizational capacity through three strategies: setting standards for learning of high intellectual quality; providing sustained schoolwide professional development; and using deregulation to increase school autonomy. In short, dynamic internal learning communities and their relationships with external networks made the difference. Evidence on the critical combination of internal and external learning is mounting (Fullan, 2001).

There are instructional strategies that can help teachers increase student learning. In research recently completed at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) Institute, Marzano and others (2001) identified classroom practices that generally increase student achievement: identifying similarities and differences; summarizing and note taking; receiving reinforcement for effort and recognition for achievement; doing homework and practicing; using nonlinguistic representations; learning cooperatively; setting objectives and testing hypotheses; and using

cues, questions, and advance organizers. Regardless of whether or not teachers teach to standards, these classroom practices work well.

Encouraging Collective Learning

A key task for school administrators is to create a collective expectation among teachers concerning the state's accountability criteria. That is, administrators need to raise the collective sense of teachers about state standards. Then administrators must work to ensure that teacher expectations are aligned with the state's accountability criteria (Glickman, 2002). Furthermore, administrators need to eliminate teacher isolation, so that discussions about state standards become a collective mission of the school and school district.

"The key to student growth is educator growth" (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. XV). In a collective learning environment, teachers become generators of professional knowledge rather than simply consumers of innovations. Innovations are built around the system rather than using prepackaged school improvement models. Changing mental models replaces training educators in new behaviors (Senge, 1990, 2001). Continuous instruction-embedded staff development replaces one-shot non-instruction specific professional development events (Hall & Hord, 2001). Single–loop, linear learning that monitors whether a system is reaching its goals is replaced by double–loop learning where systems are able to revisit whether goals are still appropriate and then re-cycle as needed (Argyris, 1990).

School administrators must develop and sustain school structures and cultures that foster individual and group learning. That is, administrators must stimulate an environment in which new information and practices are

eagerly incorporated into the system. Teachers are more likely to pursue their group and individual learning when there are supportive conditions in the school and school district, such as particularly effective leadership (Leithwood & Louis, 2000). Schools where teachers collaborate in discussing issues related to their school improvement efforts are more likely to be able to take advantage of internally and externally generated information (Louis & Kruse, 2000). Teachers can become willing recipients of research information if they are embedded in a setting where meaningful and sustained interaction with researchers occurs in an egalitarian context.

Aligning with State Standards

Most states are attempting to align their tests with their standards. Gandal and Vranek (2001) encourage states to consider three principles in this endeavor. First, tests not based on the standards are neither fair nor helpful to parents or students. States that have developed their own tests have done a good job of ensuring that the content of the test can be found in the standards. That is, children will not be tested on knowledge and skills they have not been taught. This is what Fenwick English and Betty Steffy (2001) refer to as "the doctrine of no surprises." However, the same is not true when states use generic, off-the-shelf standardized tests. Such tests cannot measure the breadth and depth of each state's standards. Second, when the standards are rich and rigorous, the tests must be as well. Tests must tap both the breadth and depth of the content and skills in the standards. Third, tests must become more challenging in each successive grade. The solid foundation of knowledge and skills developed in the early grades should evolve into more complex skills in the later grades.

If one accepts the premise that tests drive curriculum and instruction, perhaps the easiest way to improve instruction and increase student achievement is to construct better tests. Critics argue that many state-mandated tests require students to recall obscure factual knowledge, which limits the time teachers have available to focus on critical thinking skills (McNeil, 2001). However, according to Yeh (2001), it is possible to design force-choice items (multiple-choice test items) that test reasoning and critical thinking. Such tests could require students to *use* facts, rather than *recall* them. And test questions could elicit content knowledge that is worth learning.

Yeh argues that to prepare students to think critically, teachers could teach children to identify what is significant. Teachers could model the critical thinking process in the classroom, during instruction, through assignments, in preparing for tests, and in the content of the test itself. By aligning test content with worthwhile questions in core subject areas, it may be possible to rescue testing and instruction from the current focus on the recall of trivial factual knowledge. Test items could be created for a range of subjects and levels of difficulty. Then there would be little incentive for teachers to drill students on factual knowledge.

Providing Support

One of the biggest challenges in advancing state standards and tests, and the accountability provisions tied to them, is providing teachers with the training, teaching tools, and support they need to help all students reach high standards. Specifically, teachers need access to curriculum guides, textbooks, or specific training connected to state standards. They need access to lessons

or teaching units that match state standards. They need training on using state test results to diagnose learning gaps (Lunenburg & Irby, 1999). Teachers must know how each student performed on every multiple-choice item and other questions on the state test. And training must be in the teachers' subject areas. Only then can teachers be prepared to help students achieve at high levels on state-mandated tests.

In addition to professional development for teachers, all schools need an intervention and support system for students who lag behind in learning the curriculum. Schools need to provide additional help to students who lag behind in core subjects, either in school, after school, on weekends, or during the summer. School administrators need to supply the financial resources to fulfill this mandate. This involves acquiring materials, information, or technology; manipulating schedules or release time to create opportunities for teachers to learn; facilitating professional networks; and creating an environment that supports school improvement efforts (Lunenburg, 1995).

Higher state standards usually mean changes in curriculum, instruction, and assessment – that is, changes in teaching and learning. The history of school reform indicates that innovations in teaching and learning seldom penetrate more than a few schools and seldom endure when they do (Elmore, 2000). Innovations frequently fail because the individuals who make it happen, those closest to the firing line – classroom teachers, may not be committed to the effort or may not have the skills to grapple with the basic challenge being posed (Fullan, 2001). Teachers are motivated to change when their personal goals are aligned with change, when they are confident in their ability to change, and when they feel supported in attempting the change

(Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2000). To gain commitment of teachers and students to pursue school improvement efforts, school administrators must promote school cultures that reward achievement.

Making Data-Driven Decisions

How can school districts gauge their progress in achieving high state standards? Three factors can increase a school district's progress in meeting state standards (Sclafani, 2001). The primary factor is the availability of performance data connected to each student, broken down by specific objectives and target levels in the state standards. Then schools across the district and across the state are able to connect what is taught to what is learned. The state standards should be clear enough to specify what each teacher should teach. And a state-mandated test, aligned with state standards, will indicate what students have learned. Also, teachers need access to longitudinal data on each student in their classroom. With such data, teachers are able to develop individual and small-group education plans to ensure mastery of areas of weakness from previous years while also moving students forward in the state-mandated curriculum.

The second factor is the public nature of the measurement system. Assuming the school district has a system of rating schools, annually the district should publish a matrix of schools and honor those schools that have performed at high levels. This provides an impetus for low-performing schools to improve their performance. It also provides role models for other schools to emulate. At the school and classroom levels, it provides a blueprint of those areas where teachers should focus their individual education plans and where grade levels or schools should focus the school's

professional development plans. The public nature of the data from the accountability system makes clear where schools are. Assuming the state disaggregates its data by race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status, performance of each subgroup of students on state-mandated tests makes the school community aware of which students are well served and which students are not well served by the school district's curriculum and instruction.

The third factor in gauging progress toward meeting state standards is the specifically targeted assistance provided to schools that are performing at low levels. Before the advent of state accountability systems, it was not evident which schools needed help. The first step is to target the schools in need of help based on student performance data. Each targeted school is paired with a team of principals, curriculum specialists/instructional coaches, and researchers to observe current practices, discuss student performance data with the staff, and assist in the development and implementation of an improvement plan. The targeted schools learn how to align their program of professional development to the weaknesses identified by the data. They learn how to develop an improvement plan to guide their activities and monitor the outcomes of the activities, all of which are designed to raise student performance levels.

In sum, the new framework for school improvement that we have described here provides a powerful and useful model for achieving school success. Sustained districtwide school improvement is not possible without a strong connection across levels of organization (school, school district, community, and state). Internal school development is necessary from

principals, teachers, and parents; but school improvement cannot occur unless each school is supported by a strong external infrastructure; stable political environments; and resources outside the school, including leadership from the superintendent and school board as well as leadership from the state department.

Democratic Community

The concept of democratic community is not new. Much of the current work is grounded in Dewey's ideas promulgated more than 100 years ago (Dewey, 1900). For example, at the turn of the twentieth century, John Dewey argued that schools should embody the kind of community that combined the best aspects of classic liberalism and communitarianism or, in Dewey's words, of "individualism and socialism" (p. 7) - a place that could prepare people to live within and to maintain a healthy, democratic society. However Dewey's vision was relatively uninfluential throughout much of the twentieth century. A resurgence of interest in Dewey and his concept of a democratic community as it relates to schooling has emerged in education in recent years (Rogers, 2002; Schutz, 2001; Webber, 2001).

At mid–twentieth century, James Contant (1953) suggested that the basic tenets of American democracy should be taught in schools, along with language, history, economics, science, mathematics, and the arts. More recently, Wood (1992) expands this theme by suggesting that democratic citizenship should be taught in schools. These include traits such as commitment to community and a desire to participate; values such as justice, liberty, and equality; skills of interpretation, debate, and compromise; and

habits of study and reflection. Others concur. Hargreaves (1997) suggests that the cultivation of " openness, informality, care, attentiveness, lateral working relationships, reciprocal collaboration, candid and vibrant dialogue, and the willingness to face uncertainty together" (p. 22) is a central purpose of schooling, not merely the production of employable workers.

Critiques concerning the meaning of democracy in our time have proliferated over the last two decades. And a number of publications have addressed the various meanings of community. For example, community is described in multiple ways in the education literature (Calderwood, 2000; Furman, 2003; Osterman, 2001; Shields, 2003). Community is referred to as "professional community" among educators, "learning community" among students, "school–community" addressing school–community relations, and "community of difference" in multicultural settings. Furman and Starratt (2002) advocate the definition of community of difference as more compatible with contemporary, postmodernism. Thinking about community of difference requires a re-conceptualization of the concept of community itself, moving away from homogeneity toward a new center in which diverse groups negotiate a commitment to the common good. According to Shields, "a *community of difference* begins, not with an assumption of shared norms, beliefs, and values; but with the need for respect, dialogue, and understanding" (Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2002, p. 132). Educational leaders who want to move toward a community of difference will be informed by research on race and ethnicity.

Similarly, democracy is subject to many interpretations in education. Its most common meaning is usually tied to the idea of the nation–state and

the American version of democracy. According to Mitchell (2001), democratic community cannot be limited to such a narrow view of democracy in a world characterized by diversity, fragmentation, and globalization. National boundaries are permeated by regional and global alliances. Children should be educated within an increasingly global context.

My version of democratic community resembles more the ideas promulgated by Gail Furman and Robert Starratt (2002). They extend the emerging work on democratic community through a deeper analysis of the linkages between democratic community and leadership in schools. And Furman and Starratt's model places democratic community in a context of postmodernism, characterized by inclusiveness, interdependence, and transnationalism. In their view and mine, professional community, learning community, school–community, and community of difference, and the American version of democracy, along with Dewey's progressivism, laid much of the groundwork for the concept democratic community, but require some modifications in a contemporary, postmodern context of diversity, fragmentation, and globalization.

Some common themes are beginning to emerge regarding the concept of democratic community derived from Dewey's progressivism and its more contemporary, postmodern interpretations. Furman and Starratt (2002) discuss the nature and character of democratic community and how it might be enacted in schools. The central tenets of democratic schools include the following:

1. Democratic community is based on the open flow of ideas that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.

2. Democratic community involves the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.
3. Democratic community places responsibility on individuals to participate in open inquiry, collective choices, and actions in the interest of the common good.
4. Democratic community involves acting for others as well as with others in the interest of the common good.
5. Democratic community is based on the acceptance and celebration of difference, and it will focus on the integral linkages between the school, the surrounding community, and the larger global community.
6. Creating democratic community in schools involves systematic attention to structure, process, and curriculum and instruction.

Family and Community Involvement

Schools alone cannot adequately provide children and youth with the necessary resources and support they need to become successful students, productive workers, and responsible citizens in a democratic society. Family and community involvement in schools is viewed as so critical for the success of students, especially poor and minority students, that many reform programs include a family and community involvement component in their school improvement strategies (Sanders, Allen-Jones, & Abel, 2002).

Epstein's (2001) parent involvement strategies, Henry Levin's (1987)"Accelerated Schools", Robert Slavin's (2001) "Success for All" schools, and James Comer's (1993, 1996) "School Development Program" are grounded in developing inclusive and democratic connections with families and communities. The programs place much emphasis on family and

community support processes. They provide the school's faculty with strategies for increasing parent involvement, raising attendance rates, improving classroom management, preventing behavior problems, integrating social and health services, and solving other nonacademic problems. The programs structure the school in ways that fundamentally change the notion of school as merely an academic institution.

Levin's "Accelerated Schools", Slavin's "Success for All" schools, and Comer's "School Development Program" have been shown to result in student success in school, including positive attitudes toward school, better attendance and behavior in school, higher rates of homework completion, and better achievement in academic subjects. This research has been supplemented by studies that have shown that well–planned activities, such as Epsein's parent involvement strategies, can increase parent and community involvement even among families traditionally considered hard to reach, including low income, minority, and single–parent families.

National and State Education Policies

Research on the benefits of family and community involvement has had a positive effect on national policies during the past decade. *The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994*, for example, identified eight national goals for public schools. One of these goals, Goal 8 states:

> Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children (*Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994*, p. 15).

Linked to Goals 2000 was the *Improving America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994*, a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Among other things, this reauthorization strengthened the family involvement component of Title I, which seeks to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes of poor children. The reauthorization of Title I mandated that school-level family involvement policies include parent/school agreements designed to clarify the goals, expectations, and shared responsibilities of schools and parents as partners in students' education. Such agreements were intended to be helpful frameworks for discussions between schools and parents about how to encourage better student performance in school. And, recently, "Title V: Promoting Informed Parental Choice and Innovative Programs" of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* contains numerous provisions for school, family, and community involvement in students' learning.

States have developed standards to encourage greater family and community involvement in schools. Key educational reform groups, such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have developed standards pertaining to parent and community involvement in schools. Created in 1994, ISLLC is a consortium of thirty-two education agencies and thirteen educational administration associations that have established an education policy framework for school leadership. In 1996, the consortium adopted ISLLC Standards for School Leaders. Currently, thirty-eight states have either adopted or adapted the ISLLC Standards and are in

different stages of implementing the standards in reforming educational leadership within their state. Standard 4 of the six standards states:

> A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1996, p. 16).

In 1992, INTASC (a consortium of state education agencies, higher education institutions, and national education organizations) developed 10 principles that all teachers should master. According to Principle 10, teachers are expected to foster relationships with school colleagues, parents, and community agencies to support students' learning. NCATE emphasized in its standard for content knowledge that teacher candidates should understand principles and strategies for school, family, and community partnerships to support students' learning.

Curriculum and Instruction

A resurgence of interest in democratic community in recent years has implications for schools and schooling, particularly as it relates to curriculum and instruction. To be sure, the enactment of democratic community in schools would require changes in curriculum and instruction. These modifications in curriculum and teaching would be compatible with some components found in Theodore Sizer's (1984, 1992, 1997) "Coalition of Essential Schools" (CES) and Mortimer Adler's (1982) "Paideia Proposal" (PP). More specifically, two powerful strategies that are grounded in the

tenets of democratic community and found in Sizer's CES and Adler's PP are critical thinking and constructivism.

Critical Thinking. The Center for Critical Thinking (2003) provides an excellent treatise on critical thinking applied to instruction. Critical thinking shifts classroom design from a model that largely ignores thinking to one that renders it pervasive and necessary. Critical teaching views content as something alive only in minds, modes of thinking driven by questions, existing in textbooks only to be regenerated in the minds of students.

Once we understand content as inseparable from the thinking that generates, organizes, analyzes, synthesizes, evaluates, and transforms it, we recognize that content cannot in principle ever be "completed" because thinking is never completed. To understand content, therefore, is to understand its implications. But to understand its implications, one must understand that those implications in turn have further implications, and hence must be thoughtfully explored.

The problem with didactic teaching is that content is inadvertently treated as static, as virtually "dead." Content is treated as something to be mimicked, to be repeated back, to be parroted. And because students only rarely process content deeply when they play the role of passive listeners in lecture-centered instruction, little is learned in the long term. Furthermore, because students are taught content in a way that renders them unlikely to think it through, their minds retreat into rote memorization, abandoning any attempt to grasp the logic of what they are committing to memory.

Those who teach critically emphasize that only those who can "think" through content truly learn it. Content "dies" when one tries to learn it

mechanically. Content has to take root in the thinking of students and, when properly learned, transforms the way they think. Hence, when students study a subject in a critical way, they take possession of a new mode to thinking that, so internalized, generates new thoughts, understandings, and beliefs. Their thinking, now driven by a set of new questions, becomes an instrument of insight and a new point of view.

History texts become, in the minds of students thinking critically, a stimulus to historical thinking. Geography texts are internalized as geographical thinking. Mathematical content is transformed into mathematical thinking. As a result of being taught to think critically, students study biology and become biological thinkers. They study sociology and begin to notice the permissions, injunctions, and taboos of the groups in which they participate. They study literature and begin to notice the way in which all humans tend to define their lives in the stories they tell. They study economics and begin to notice how much of their behavior is intertwined with economic forces and needs.

There are ways, indeed almost an unlimited number, to stimulate critical thinking at every educational level and in every teaching setting. When considering technology for this stimulation, the World Wide Web (WWW) is important to instructional design; it contains three keys to educational value: hypertext, the delivery of multimedia, and true interactivity. These values are operant and alive in the classroom through such applications as graphics, sound, and video, which bring to life world events, museum tours, library visits, world visits, and up-to-date weather maps. Through these WWW mechanisms, a constructivist instructional

model advances higher-level instruction, such as problem solving and increased learner control. The WWW becomes a necessary tool for student-centered discovery and research. Of course, it can also be used for lower-level drill and practice.

At every level and in all subjects, students need to learn how to ask questions precisely, define contexts and purposes, pursue relevant information, analyze key concepts, derive sound inferences, generate good reasons, recognize questionable assumptions, trace important implications, and think emphatically within different points of view. The WWW enables learners and teachers in each area by providing information for good reasoners to figure things out. Critical thinking may be a key organizing concept for curriculum reform and for improving teaching and learning (Center for Critical Thinking, 2003).

Constructivism. Constructivism may be the most significant recent trend in education relative to the dynamic relationship between how teachers teach and how children learn. One foundational premise of constructivism is that children actively construct their knowledge, rather than simply absorbing ideas spoken to them by teachers. For example, more than 30 years ago, Jean Piaget (1970) proposed that children make sense in ways very different from adults, and that they learn through the process of trying to make things happen, trying to manipulate their environment. Theories such as these, which assert that "people are not recorders of information, but builders of knowledge structures", have been grouped under the heading of *constructivism*. Thus, students are ultimately responsible for their own learning within a learning atmosphere in which teachers value student

thinking, initiate lessons that foster cooperative learning, provide opportunities for students to be exposed to interdisciplinary curriculum, structure learning around primary concepts, and facilitate authentic assessment of student understanding.

In constructivist theory, it is assumed that learners have to construct their own knowledge - individually and collectively. Each learner has a repertoire of conceptions and skills with which she or he must construct knowledge to solve problems presented by the environment. The role of the teacher and other learners is to provide the setting, pose the challenges, and offer the support that will encourage cognitive construction. Because students lack the experience of experts in the field, teachers bear a great responsibility for guiding student activity, modeling behavior, and providing examples that will transform student group discussions into meaningful communication about subject matter.

Constructivism emphasizes the processes by which children create and develop their ideas. Applications lie in creating curricula that not only match but also challenge children's understanding, fostering further growth and development of the mind. Furthermore, when children collaborate in cooperative learning groups, they share the process of constructing their ideas with others. This collective effort provides the opportunity for children to reflect on and elaborate not only their own ideas but also those of their peers. With improvement of and access to the WWW, the children's cooperative classroom becomes the world. In this cooperative learning setting, children view their peers as resources rather than as competitors. A

feeling of teamwork ensues. These processes have resulted in substantial advances in student learning (Brooks & Brooks, 2003).

Constructivism is serving as the basis for many of the current reforms in several subject matter disciplines. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics published *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* (1989), which calls for mathematics classrooms where problem solving, concept development, and the construction of learner-generated solutions and algorithms are stressed rather than drill and practice on correct procedures and facts to get the "right" answer. The National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment similarly issued *National Science Education Standards* (1996), which calls for science education reform based on experimentation and learner-generated inquiry, investigations, hypotheses, and models. The National Council of Teacher of English has called for emergent literacy as an important thrust in language arts reform. Interdisciplinary curricula is the theme of social studies reform being advocated by the National Council of Social Studies. In sum, Sizer's "Coalition of Essential Schools", Adler's "Paideia Proposal", critical thinking, and constructivism are compatible with the principles of democratic community, particularly the open flow of ideas, critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, and dialogue.

Social Justice

A concern for social justice is at the core of democracy. The United States prides itself on being a fair and just democracy, a nation in which every citizen is to be treated equally in social, economic, political, and educational

arenas. According to its Constitution, the United States seeks to establish "liberty and justice for all." In spite of these goals, U.S. society is composed of many inequities: rich and poor, educated and illiterate, powerful and powerless. Now in the first decade of the twenty-first century, educational leaders must continue to question whether they have an obligation to create a nation whose words are supported by the experiences of its citizens.

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution addressed the question of equal opportunity, declaring that: "no state shall deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws. " The mandate that people receive equal protection extends to equal educational opportunity. While this fundamental affirmation of equal opportunity has been part of American discourse since the inception of this nation which is found in the Declaration of Independence and other documents, inequities in the major social, economic, political, and educational institutions continue to exist in American society.

Inequities in schooling are among the social injustices with which educational leaders need to be most concerned. Although it has been a stated goal in the United States that all youngsters, regardless of family background, should benefit from their education, many students do not. Most schools do not teach all students at the same academic level. The U.S. educational system, to this day, is beset with inequities that exacerbate racial and class-based challenges. Differential levels of success in school distributed along race and social class lines continues to be the most pernicious and prevailing dilemma of schooling. Furthermore, there is considerable empirical evidence

that children of color experience negative and inequitable treatment in typical public schools (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001).

Many children of color find themselves marginalized in toxic schools that offer inferior education. These schools affect the opportunities and experiences of students of color in several immediate ways: They tend to have limited resources; textbooks and curricula are outdated; and computers are few and obsolete. Many of the teachers do not have credentials in the subjects they teach. Tracking systems block minority students' access to the more rigorous and challenging classes, which retain these students in noncollege bound destinations. These schools generally offer few (if any) Advanced Placement courses, which are critical for entry in many of the more competitive colleges. Furthermore, African American students are over represented in special education programs, compared with the percentage of the overall student population. More than a third of African American students (as compared with fewer than a fifth of White students) in special education are labeled with the more stigmatizing labels of "mentally retarded" and "emotionally disturbed". Conversely, four-fifths of the White students (as compared with two-thirds of the African American students) in special education are much more likely to be labeled "learning disabled" or "speech impaired." African American males are more than twice as likely as White males to be suspended or expelled from school or to receive corporal punishment (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Jonathan Kozol, in *Savage Inequalities* (1991), described the inferior education received by minority students (particularly, African American and Hispanic Americans) –

fewer resources, inequities in funding, inadequate facilities, tracking systems, low expectations, segregated schools, and hostile learning environments.

These related inequities, the persistent and disproportionate academic underachievement of children of color and their injurious treatment in our schools, are compelling evidence that the United States public education system remains systemically racist (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001). This is not to suggest that racism is consciously intended or even recognized by educators; it is institutional racism that is systemically embedded in assumptions, policies and procedures, practices, and structures of schooling. Nevertheless, every day more that 17 million African American, Hispanic American, Native American, and Asian American children experience the effects of systemic racism in U.S. public schools (Skrla, 2001).

Systemic Racism in Schools

Racism in the United States includes a broad spectrum (individual, institutional, white racism, racial prejudice, interethnic and intraethnic hostility, and cultural racism to name a few (Donaldson, 2000). African American, Asian American, European American, Hispanic American, Native American, and mixed racial categories all play a part within these subtle racist systems. However, the targets of racism in our schools and in society are people of color through both institutional and individual racism. Racial prejudice, individual bigotry, and institutional racism have devastating effects on students and society at large.

The disproportionate academic underachievement by children of color has been the driving force behind the current accountability policy in the United States. However, a shift in U.S. demographics would seem to

exacerbate the problem of achieving educational equity and its attendant impact on social justice. The student population grows increasingly diverse, the teaching force remains predominantly white, and achievement of children of color continues to lag significantly behind their white counterparts (Hytten & Adkins, 2001).

Demographic trends indicate that growth in the nation's minority population will have significant implications for public schools. In 1990, the total population of the United States was 248.7 million and increased to 281.4 million in 2000, an increase of 32.7 million people (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). A significant proportion of individuals making up this increase are people of color. Demographic projections indicate that the nation's population will grow to 294 million by the year 2020. At that time, more than 98 million Americans, one-third of the nation, will be non-white (Hodgkinson, 2001). Moreover, students of color are the fastest growing segment of the school population and have been the least well served by the schools. The U.S. Census in 2000 reported that of the nation's 49 million elementary and secondary school students, 38 million were white; 8 million were African American; 7.3 million were Hispanic American, and 2.1 million were Asian or Pacific Islanders. Experts project that the percentage of students of color in elementary and secondary schools will increase steadily during the coming decades from 30% in 1990, to 36% in 2000 and will reach 50% of the public school population in the 25 major cities in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

In general, similar demographic shifts have not occurred in the teaching ranks. Despite the changing racial makeup of public school students

in the United States, 87.2% of the teaching force is white, 6.3% are African American, and 2.0% are classified as "other" (National Education Association, 2003). This often results in considerable cultural and social distance between middle–class white teachers and students of color. Young and Laible (2000) suggest that white educators and educational leaders do not have a thorough enough understanding of racism in its many manifestations, nor do they comprehend the ways in which they are perpetuating white racism in their schools. Short (1999) further summarizes the consequences of this mismatch between white middle-class teachers and students of color. She cites how teacher preparation programs rarely train teacher candidates in strategies for teaching culturally diverse students. The lack of familiarity with their students' cultures, learning styles, and communication patterns translates into teachers holding negative expectations for students, what some theorists refer to as "deficit thinking" (Valencia, 1997). And often, inappropriate curricula, instructional materials, and assessments are used with these students.

Murray and Clark (1990) found eight forms of racism operating in U.S. schools at all grade levels. They are the following: (1) hostile and insensitive acts; (2) bias in the use of harsh sanctions; (3) inequalities in the amount of teacher attention given to students; (4) bias in the selection of curriculum materials; (5) inequalities in the amount of instructional time provided; (6) biased attitudes toward students; (7) failure to hire educators and other personnel of color; and (8) denial of racist actions. These subtle forms of racism that exist in schools threaten the academic success of students of color. For example, denial of racist actions and attitudes, and biased education,

policies, and hiring practices, are present in schools at all levels and adversely affect students' success in school. For example, Donaldson (1996) found that racist treatments affect the learning and development of students of color. The study confirmed that, as a result of racist treatment, students felt low self-esteem, causing diminished interest in school; a perceived need to overachieve academically; and guilt and embarrassment at seeing other students victimized.

Thomas Good (1987) reviewed the research on teachers' differential treatment of high-achieving students and at-risk students. He identified 17 teaching behaviors that are used with different frequencies with the two groups of students. These behaviors define a pattern of diminished expectations for at-risk students' ability to learn, and perhaps a lower regard for their personal worth as learners. The teaching practices are the following: (1) wait less time for at-risk students to answer questions, (2) give at-risk students the answer or call on someone else rather than try to improve their responses by giving clues or using other teaching techniques, (3) reward inappropriate behavior or incorrect answers by at-risk students, (4) criticize at-risk students more often for failure, (5) praise at-risk students less frequently than high achieving students for success, (6) fail to give feedback to the public responses of at-risk students, (7) pay less attention to at-risk students or interact with them less frequently, (8) call on at-risk students less often to respond to questions, or ask them only easier, nonanalytical questions, (9) seat at-risk students farther away from the teacher, (10) demand less from at-risk students, (11) interact with at-risk students more privately than publicly and monitor and structure their activities more closely, (12)

grade tests or assignments in a differential manner, so that high-achieving but not at-risk students are given the benefit of the doubt in borderline cases, (13) have less friendly interaction with at-risk students including less smiling and less warm or more anxious voice tones, (14) provide briefer and less informative feedback to the questions of at-risk students, (15) provide less eye contact and other nonverbal communication of attention and responsiveness interacting with at-risk students, (16) make less use of effective but time-consuming instructional methods with at-risk students when time is limited, and (17) evidence less acceptance and use of ideas given by at-risk students. According to Good, academic achievement is highly correlated with race and social class, which means that at-risk students are more likely to come from disadvantaged home backgrounds, whereas high-achieving students are likely to come from advantaged home backgrounds. Therefore, the differential teaching behaviors found by Good suggest a pattern of discrimination based on students' race and social class as well as their achievement level.

A recent Education Trust document (2002) concluded, "We take students who have less to begin with and give them less in school too." Darling–Hammond (1997) confirmed this data, making explicit reference to teachers in the schools. Being poor, being of color, being an inner city resident do not cause differences in educational achievement. Rather the lack of resources put into the education of some students and the inequitable treatment of children of color and low-income children are the major causes of difference and social injustice. And teachers are the most important educational resource available to students, according to Darling-Hammond.

In its simplest form, social justice is linked to redressing institutionalized inequality and systemic racism. Rawls (1971) argues that social justice is defined by four principles. The first is based on equality of treatment of all members of society (equal rights and liberties). The second is based on all people being regarded as individuals. The third involves giving everyone a fair chance (equal opportunity). The fourth involves giving the greatest social and economic benefits to those least advantaged. The application of these four principles of social justice to education would mean that more resources should be allocated to improve circumstances of those historically least served by the system rather than treating all individuals equally. The notion of social justice suggests that treating all people equally may be inherently unequal. Rawls argues that all education stakeholders are obligated not only to safeguard individuals' rights, but also to actively redress inequality of opportunity in education. This notion posits that educational leaders are obligated to examine the circumstances in which children of color and poverty are educated. Social justice in schooling then would mean equal treatment, access, and outcomes for children from oppressed groups. It would mean closing the achievement gap between children from low-income communities and communities of color and their mainstream peers so they are successful in school. That is, it would mean that school success would be equitable across such differences as race and socioeconomic status. It would mean working toward such a vision of social justice in school by engaging the powerful force of accountability policy, that is, excellence and equity for all children.

Excellence and Equity

Educational leadership for social justice is founded on the belief that schooling must be democratic, and an understanding that schooling is not democratic "unless its practices are excellent and equitable" (Skrtic, 1991a, p. 199). Skrtic (1991b) asserts that educational equity "is a precondition for excellence" (p. 181). Gordon (1999) linked social justice to excellence and equity by arguing:

> The failure to achieve universally effective education in our society is known to be a correlate of our failure to achieve social justice. By almost any measure, there continue to be serious differences between the level and quality of educational achievement for children coming from rich or from poor families, and from ethnic-majority or from some ethnic–minority group families. Low status ethnic-minority groups continue to be overrepresented in the low achievement groups in our schools and are correspondingly underrepresented in high academic achievement groups. (p. XII)

We must achieve equal educational results for all children. Failure to do so will hamper specific groups from attaining the fundamental, primary goods and services distributed by society – rights, liberties, self–respect, power, opportunities, income, and wealth. Education is a social institution, controlling access to important opportunities and resources.

Education policy in the United States is dominated by accountability concerns. Public education issues are a top priority of national and state political agendas. *The Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994*, the *Improving*

America's Schools Act (IASA) of 1994 (a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965), and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* call for equal treatment, access, and outcomes for all children.

There are numerous reports that demonstrate that it is possible to find effective public schools where administrators, teachers, and parents collaborate to produce high achievement for all students. But these successes occur in only a small number of schools. We still cannot account for the fact that some students master academic content and many others do not. And there is little research on organizational design and practice in exceptionally high-performing school districts (Elmore, 2000). The available documentation does point to some common themes that high–performing school districts possess, but the knowledge base on which to offer advice to school districts and administrators on the design of sustained districtwide improvement processes is limited.

Government officials, academic scholars, business leaders, and the educational community have begun to look at state accountability systems to realize the vision that "equity and excellence need not be mutually exclusive goals" (Viadero, 1999, p. 24). Within the past 10 years a few examples of sustained districtwide academic success of children have begun to emerge in the research literature. These examples have appeared in states that have highly developed, stable accountability systems, such as Connecticut, Kentucky, New York, North Carolina, and Texas. There is evidence from these states and others that their accountability systems driven by state policy initiatives have improved student performance for all students (as measured by state achievement tests, National Assessment of Educational Progress

(NAEP), Advanced Placement (AP) exams, and ACT and SAT tests). In addition, there is evidence of narrowing of the achievement gap between the performance of children of color and low-income children and that of their white and more economically advantaged counterparts (Skrla, Scheurich, Johnson, & Koschoreck, 2001).

Preliminary research in some of these districts found evidence of common strategic elements in the way these districts managed themselves. Superintendents in high-performing districts exhibited a much greater clarity of purpose, along with a much greater willingness to exercise tighter controls over evidence of performance. They used data on student performance to focus attention on problems and successes; they built district accountability systems that complemented their own state's system; and they forged strong relationships with their school boards around improvement goals. They created a climate in which teachers and principals were collectively responsible for student learning and in which the improvement of instruction was the central task. Incentive structures in these districts focused on the performance of all students, not just on average school performance. Superintendents realigned district offices in these school districts to focus on direct relationships with schools around instructional issues; and they focused more energy and resources on content-specific professional development (Elmore, 2000). The success of these school districts confirms the findings of Valencia (1997) that it is critically important for school leaders to reject assumptions of deficit thinking. Leaders who reject deficit thinking about students and their parents engage in what many theorists call "capacity building", helping people to acquire skills and dispositions to learn new ways

of thinking and acting (Fullan, 2001). Darling-Hammond (1997) underscores the fundamental importance of capacity building skills on the part of educators when she states that the capacity to "achieve associations beyond those of any narrow group – to live and learn heterogeneously together" undergirds our ability to live in a diverse democratic society (Shields, Larocque, & Oberg, 2001)

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